



George W. Hill
Oral History Transcription
September 9, 2003 [Tape 1, Side A]

Interviewed by:	Lester Lamon, David Healey
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Transcribed by:	Howard Dukes, staff, Civil Rights Heritage Center
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Summary:	George Hill was a graduate of Washington High School and an all-city basketball player. He attended Central State University in Ohio for a while on a basketball scholarship, but returned to South Bend to help his family. Back in South Bend, he became involved in city government and politics, working on the campaign of Jerry Miller, who was mayor from 1972-76. Hill spent most of his career working for various job training programs.

0:00:00 [Lester Lamon]: This interview is with Mr. George Hill. The interview is conducted on September 9, 2003. The interviewers are Les Lamon and David Healey.

Mr. Hill, if you would give us a little background about yourself, your relationship to South Bend, the things that... milestones in your life.

[George Hill]: I was born and raised in South Bend. I was born in the poor part of town. I went to Oliver Elementary and Middle school, went to Washington High School. I graduated in 1955. I was a basketball player; as a matter of fact, I was the captain and most valuable player. I was Twin Cities scoring champion when I was a senior.

0:01:03 [LL]: This was at Washington High School?

[GH]: Washington High School and we won the city championship conference and holiday tourney. And out of high school I went down to Central State. I was down there for a year. Came home, and went to work. Right after that my mother and father got a divorce, and I worked to help to support my brother and younger sister. So, I didn't get a chance then. Basically, in 1960, I was the lathe operator at Matson Machine Corporation. I was the only minority in the business, and then later I went to Rockwell Standard. I ended up being in the skilled trades die trail man and the factory closed in 1967.

0:02:07 I went to Bendix and I worked in aerospace and then they transferred me and made me a supervisor. After that I... I took a job as a first project director of LaSalle Park Homes, and I was offered a job at Ivy Tech as an instructor. I worked there until 1972, when Jerry Miller was elected mayor and he took office in January and he offered me a job in July 1972. I went down as a liaison director, and also later they made me the public employment program director, and they had a series of jobs. I was... also I worked as the summer... director of summer programs. I had about 1,500 kids in the program. And stayed down there and when programs changed, names changed. I worked through with the federal system for thirty years and then I retired in last July.

0:03:45 [LL]: Ok. So, you really worked for the city or for governmental...

[GH]: Governmental.

[LL]: Agencies for 30 years.

[GH]: Yes.

[LL]: '72 to 2002. You mention... there are several things that are very interesting things along the line there that occur to me. You mention that Jerry Miller who was mayor in '72, that's when he was elected, wasn't he?

[GH]: Jerry Miller who was mayor in '72. That's when he was elected.

[GH]: Yeah. He took office in January of '72.

[LL]: Had you worked for his campaign?

[GH]: Yes. Yes, I did.

[LL]: Had you been involved in politics before then?

[GH]: Not... No. I really got involved heavily with Jerry Miller. I was more or less like the coordinator in the black community.

[LL]: How did you get interested... or get that position?

0:04:35 [GH]: I don't know I... somebody just asked me. I was kind of popular... the job I had at Ivy Tech was working with people that it was really hard to find jobs for. They were people who... some folks thought they were just untrainable, but they would put them in a class called Building Maintenance, and my job out of Ivy Tech was to try to teach them the janitorial trade and also teach them how to act. How to get along with people. Not only were they poorly skilled, they had to some real bad hang ups. A lot of people come up from Beatty Memorial Hospital then was a mental hospital—it wasn't a prison then, and it was getting a lot of inmates. A lot of people from there... was getting a lot of inmates from Michigan City prison that was been paroled from Michigan City and also from Pendleton.

0:05:27 [LL]: What hospital was this?

[GH]: Beatty Memorial was the... Now it's called Westville.

[LL]: Oh yeah, ok that's Westville. Ok. And Ivy Tech was working with some of their people?

[GH]: What happened. Ivy Tech had become... they ran the South Bend Skill Center which was a division of Ivy Tech and we... they had classes

like welding, machine repair, machine shop, auto body, and then they had clerical, and then I had the building maintenance class. Usually, if you couldn't fit into anywhere else, they would just send you down to me. So, I had a lot of people that really never had a job.

0:06:25 [LL]: No job...

[GH]: They're all adults, but they never actually... some of them never actually have held a job before. Or had a bad police or prison record.

[LL]: So, having that kind of position made you somewhat well-known in the black community.

[GH]: Well yes, and I was really active in Model Cities programs too. I was elected to the Model Cities Board by the people in the neighborhood. We had an election for the whole neighborhood, and I was elected. Then Chuck Lennon was the Executive Director, and I was elected... So I knew all the fellas on the corner—on the block, yeah.

[LL]: By that time, I'm just estimating you got to be about 35-years-old or thereabouts, if you graduated in 1955. In 1972, you're in the neighborhood of 35 years old.

[GH]: Probably yes.

[LL]: And during that period of time you got to a least have been... I know a little bit about politics, you must have been observing or connected to other people who... I mean, David has been working in this area. David, who are some of the people particularly prominent in the black community that were in politics during that time?

0:07:54 [David Healey]: Well, John Tidwell was Metropolitan Club president. Of course, you had Speed Webb. Chuck Dempsey. They were in one camp. It seemed to me there were two different camps in the African-American community during this time...

[GH]: Well there was three. Then you had Zolie Smith too.

[DH]: Zolie?

[GH]: Zolie, Zolie. Zolie Smith. She was a lady. She had a group too. Sure I... As a matter of fact, I followed all of them when I was a youngster.

[LL]: That's what I thought you must have.

[GH]: I followed them because... as a matter of fact I said John Tidwell tried to get me a job on the street department, and started saying about... I remember the day when I really had a rough time just getting a job on the street department and I ended up getting a federal program downtown where we funded... the government paid the salary and I would place people on the job in the county and the city when I was director of the PEP program.

0:08:53 [LL]: Which gave you a certain amount of clout.

[GH]: Oh yeah definitely we had probably we had... sure we had I just had jobs at the city and county.

[LL]: Yeah. How many jobs did you say you have...

[GH]: If I was gon' guess, I would say probably... probably 250 in the county and 250 in the city.

[LL]: Goodness gracious yeah. That would give you a good bit of influence. People know that you could get them a job. How 'bout these three groups?

[DH]: That's what my question is did Mr. Tidwell assist you?

[GH]: No, what we did is we went against the machine. When Jerry Miller ran, he ran against the central committee. He ran against the system. And we ran against John Tidwell and Speed Webb, and that whole group.

0:09:53 [DH]: And Chuck Dempsey?

[GH]: Yeah, yeah, yeah. They were all on the other side of the fence

[DH]: So you were rebels.

[GH]: Yeah that's right I'm a rebel. That's why I moved so fast up the ladder.

[DH]: So you bypassed the usual.

[GH]: If I had to get in that line... let's say Tidwell... I mean Harandeen ran against Jerry Miller. If I had to get in the line...

[LL]: George Harendeem?

[GH]: George Harendeem. If I had to get in that line, I wouldn't have been... I never would have gotten where I was because I would have had too long of a line or two long of a gap to come there, but there wasn't anybody in front of me when Jerry called me in there... Ok you the man.

[LL]: Wow, that's interesting.

[DH]: That is very interesting because George Tidwell had a certain group of people he promoted, and Chuck Dempsey and Speed Webb had a certain people they promoted.

0:10:46 [GH]: That's right.

[DH]: And by doing that for Mr. Miller he bypassed all of that because he's first in line. Everybody else owed somebody over at Democratic Metropolitan Club or another Democratic Club. You had to go through a pecking order.

[GH]: That's right. That's right. As a matter of fact I was warned by a lot of the people they said you're going to get hurt on this.

[LL]: You better win or you're going to lose.

[GH]: And I really... To tell you the honest truth. I didn't realize if we had lost the kind of effect it would it had on me until it was all over I just didn't know.

[DH]: What do you think that effect would have been?

[GH]: Well I probably couldn't have got a job on the street department.

[LL]: You would have been out the door. But you said Tidwell did get you a job.

[GH]: No no no no no no no. I asked him a long time ago, but I wasn't high enough in the club, and I wasn't attending meetings, so I didn't have anything coming, but I'd see him on the street I say if I get a chance if I get a job I'll join the club.

[LL]: Now he's dead, right?

[GH]: Oh, he is. John's dead I got to know him... as a matter of fact when Jerry got elected I made a special effort to get along with John Tidwell. That was probably one of the better moves I made.

0:12:05 [LL]: You're obviously good politician. Is there anybody in Tidwell's family that's left?

[GH]: Yes, sure Tidwell's... he's got a niece that's a that was married to Carl Ellison.

[LL]: Roz?

[GH]: Roz is... Yeah, Roz mother is Tidwell's sister.

[LL]: Ok. So that's his niece.

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: Ok. Did he have any children?

[GH]: No not that I know of.

[LL]: Ok.

[DH]: How did it work? You're out there getting the African-American vote. Basically you're countering Tidwell.

[GH]: Yeah, that's right.

[DH]: Dempsey and Webb

[GH]: That's right that's right

[DH]: Zolie Smith.

[GH]: That's right. I was probably hated or probably wondering where this little bug come from.

0:13:06 [DH]: Because you challenged their authority.

[GH]: I did, I did. All the way.

[DH]: And got away with it.

[GH]: Got away with it. That's why I said and I tell people this right now when we get together [inaudible] I said as a matter of fact I didn't know what I doing probably not that I would have did it again but I'm telling you I didn't know because... It was some high stakes. I had a good job I was an instructor at Ivy Tech and I was one of the higher paid instructors out there because I had a hazardous duty job and the dean hired me. Because I was working for the skill center, so my salary was real good compared to the other instructors out there. So I wasn't out on the street looking so I didn't have to go out on a ledge.

[LL]: Yeah but you did.

[GH]: Yeah I did.

[LL]: I get it sounds like that 1972 election would be a very good one to study.

[GH]: And see what I had I had election day I had this small army out there. You had so many fellows they couldn't get into the system so there were more folks out there that were trying to get into the system than was in the black community, so I had a small army out there

0:14:22 [LL]: Did the black community end up supporting Miller pretty heavily?

[GH]: I'm sure we won... I'm sure black... He won the election... I'm sure... I didn't... Yeah I'm sure that...

[LL]: They were...

[GH]: Yeah...

[LL]: Looking at it...

[GH]: Yeah, I'm sure.

[LL]: Commentary.

[GH]: There's no way if he had lost the black community he' have won the election.

[DH]: Do you think that you tapped into sort of a dissatisfaction within the black community with their leadership that they had all these years?

[GH]: No. because I and didn't try... I didn't start a club. If I had started a club and tried to duplicate what they were doing then there would have been a challenge. But what I did I just got a job and started getting people jobs all over. So, I was a worker rather and try to be a hierarchy. So you got what you call a king and you got what the king maker. So rather than try to be the king.

[LL]: You gon' be the king maker.

0:15:14 [GH]: I was going to be the king maker and that was a role that no one had. Usually when you take over you, boom you secretary of the club and you have people cater to you back and forth. I didn't do that. I went to work. I'm like everybody else at 8 o'clock in the morning I was at the county city building 7:30 Saturdays, and I started serving people rather than look down on them. Not that they were looking down on them I'm not saying that. What can you say there wasn't; anything to shoot at cuz I wasn't sitting up there.

[DH]: You didn't have the bureaucracy.

[GH]: No no no.

[DH]: That other people had.

[LL]: When you mentioned that there were three groups - three political groups.

[GH]: Yes, Zolie Smith's.

[LL]: And...

[GH]: You had Speed Webb...

[LL]: How would you describe Zolie Smith's group?

[GH]: She had most of the east side people. Some of the east side people... John and Speed Webb had people more on the west side. They both had some east siders, but John's group had Pete Donaldson and he had the group... a lot of fellows that went to school with him went to Central with him - the old timers that kind of hung together and Speed had another little group that went back and forth.

0:16:26 [LL]: Now did they go all the way back to Voorde?

[GH]: Oh, yes. Definitely. Definitely yes. They definitely go back to Voorde.

[LL]: At least the impression that I have and maybe gone past that is that Voorde sort of built a black group of supporters.

[DH]: He did they loved him. See, Voorde lived on Chapin street. He lived right down right off as a matter of fact he lived about a half a block off of Washington. A real nice house it's still there. He was loved by the black community. I was younger then, but I never heard anyone in the black community say anything against him. I'm sure that when he ran in those days he definitely carried the black community real heavy.

0:17:23 [LL]: Was there a Republican black community? I mean was there a group of Republicans...

[GH]: Lloyd Allen was mayor just before Jerry Miller. He didn't run again, Lloyd... Lloyd made some real good black appointments, but there wasn't any group no. At that particular time, I don't think a black Republican would have been too popular in the black community.

[LL]: Who were some of his appointments that you thought were particularly good?

[GH]: Well he appointed Isiah Jackson he was director of you call it COUNTS in those days. That's; when he first started the federal program. They started the COUNTS program. Then they started the emergency employment act. And the person that... Clyde Remo who I worked with at Ivy Tech he came down he left early to come downtown and work for the Republicans. So, he was down there before Jerry Miller, and I later joined him down there. But you know when Lloyd Allen was the mayor, I didn't never see or feel that they felt a lot of resentment toward him when he was in office. He didn't beat on the black community at all. Nobody was complaining.

[LL]: Under his administration was a tough time in term of social unrest and all. That's when you had some riots and a lot of unhappiness out on the west side.

0:19:09 [GH]: Well the riots actually came when Jerry... See Jerry Miller took over in 1972 and that the riots started the day I started... I started downtown on a Monday or Tuesday and the next day that's when the Model Cities thing broke out.

[LL]: I was thinking of the ones prior to model cities there were...

[GH]: Oh, you're talking about the ones that were way out on the...

[LL]: Out on Western.

[GH]: Western that's when they... Ok, I remember that. They had that also, yeah.

[LL]: And the Human Relations Commission I think was started under Allen.

[GH]: [nods yes].

[LL]: You remember a guy named George Neagu?

[GH]: I knew Neagu, sure. George Neagu, he's from Gary. He came here from Gary. He lived on Allen Street. I used to go to his house. I probably got involved more or less – I'm glad you mentioned that because I got involved earlier than I thought I did. I was – we used to go over there to George's house before he was dismissed by Allen. He lived on Allen Street. Yeah.

0:20:18 [LL]: What kinds of things was the Human Relations Commission doing? Why were you attracted to working with George? We interviewed him by the way. He lives in Michigan City.

[GH]: Well, he just seemed to be at that particular time when we had the riots a lot of people in the black community didn't have confidence in the system. But they had confidence totally in Neagu. They just figured... They just figured he's a white guy who's completely straight. He was going to give us the best shot. Just like they talk about Bill Clinton. You could go to George Neagu and he will give you the best shot. See now he's got some power and he's giving us a shot a lot of people would talk about it, 'if I was in power I'd do something.' He's in power and he's doing it. Neagu he his name remains real strong out there. They bragged about him out there.

0:21:20 [LL]: When Allen fired him then. Was there any kind of resentment to Allen for doing that?

[GH]: Well, Allen number one Allen probably didn't run on the strength of the black community so you couldn't hurt him at the polls.

[LL]: You couldn't hurt him.

[GH]: You couldn't hurt him at the polls. I was mad. I was angry. We had a little meeting, and we were sitting there just talking and everybody in the room was a little upset.

[LL]: Why do you think he got fired?

[GH]: I think cuz he... the system thought he went too far. Like I said they thought he went too far. But what probably cooled everything is that Winston Vas took his place.

[LL]: That's right. Yeah. He was black. Wasn't he?

[GH]: Yeah and he was well-liked in the black community.

[LL]: He didn't stay long did he.

0:22:19 [GH]: No, he didn't stay long, but he was a school teacher at Central I knew him real well, and I think he died about a year and a half ago. But he took his place so... and they knew that Vas was fair, and he was down the earth and professional black that could go from... Vas was the type of individual he could talk to a guy coming out of Little Johnny's Pool Room at three o'clock in the morning after he lost all his money. He could also go to Washington, DC and talk to a senator on the White House steps. So, he covered the whole spectrum. So, he did a real good job.

[LL]: He did a good job.

[GH]: Luckily, they replaced him with a person that the community liked, so the waters cooled off real quick.

[LL]: Do you remember... did you sense that after that the disturbances in '67 and '68 were there any concrete, tangible improvements that came or did it just have effective people at talking it down.

0:23:26 [GH]: Well, you know they talk about that's when they paved the alleys in LaSalle Park they were dirt they said so people out there who live out there would say we didn't have this and now we got the alleys that are paved. They were all rocks and gravel before, and we have this now. So they seemed to think that that helped when I talked to them out there now I live in the area – further out - so I had to go through there to go home at night.

[LL]: There was a feeling...was that when the park itself and the community center was built?

[GH]: It was built after that yeah.

[LL]: After that?

[GH]: [nods yes].

[LL]: Let me go back because this was something in just from George McCollough's interview. We were talking about LaSalle Park. Do you remember... did you ever live in LaSalle park?

[GH]: No, I went to school with the kids.

[LL]: Ok. Because he was telling me that there was when he was first growing up out there that there was an area that was called the BG Smith homes

0:24:34 [GH]: Yeah right.

[LL]: Ok, and those got torn down?

[GH]: Yes.

[LL]: Now, those weren't the same ones that were built during the war. Those block homes.

[GH]: I'm not George would know more than I would. They had two sets... the white and black block houses. The girls who I was in high school with they used to have parties and it was so small that you had to stand outside only a couple of kids could dance at one time, but they would still have parties here, though.

[LL]: Yeah, ok. That's in those block... Those...

[GH]: Those block white block houses. We still talk about that out there. But the block houses the homes I'm thinking the BG Smith homes were different. I'm thinking there were two sections... Two sections out there. Because I asked some guy who I know real well where did you live on the lake. Did you live in the block houses? He said nah and he started telling me who all lived in the block houses.

[LL]: Yeah.

[GH]: The boom boom boom boom.

[LL]: The Blakes and the...

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: And all them.

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: Well now where I was going with that is there was a lot of this old housing torn down and that's where the hill comes from.

0:25:46 [GH]: You're right, yeah.

[LL]: Now was... is the hill the rubbish from the BG Smith Homes or from the old block homes or both?

[GH]: That was like a dump.

[LL]: Yeah but when they tore those houses down my understanding is that they piled up all the stuff there.

[GH]: That's right they just piled everything up.

[LL]: That right but is that stuff they were tearing down is that both the BG Smith...

[GH]: To tell you the truth I really...

[LL]: The block houses... I can't keep... I can't get that straight in my mind.

[GH]: No, I don't... The only thing I know is I thought more or less it was more... I thought it was more or less a dump. I didn't go out there very often. George will probably know. I know George will know. But I... I know there's a lot of trash in there.

0:26:29 [LL]: Yeah oh yeah. Everybody talks about growing up out there. What it was. I was just trying to figure out the progression of these homes themselves these projects. These are... really, they're early projects, and

trying to get some order out of that. But you didn't you say you went to Oliver School.

[GH]: I went to Oliver.

[LL]: Where did you live over in that area?

[GH]: I lived... Okay you know where... I lived okay... you know where the viaduct is on the viaduct is on Chapin?

[LL]: Yeah.

[GH]: I lived Ok... south of the viaduct. They had an alley...

[LL]: Next to where Oliver...

[GH]: I lived across the street from Oliver...

[LL]: Right across the street from it

[GH]: Yeah, that's right. Right across the street. I lived up in an alley we lived in the alley as you come down the hill where the tracks are. And the alley was so small that if a guy would drive a car down the alley and he was drinking he'd hit the house. There wasn't enough... You could barely get a car through that alley so you could tell if a person was drunk or not.

0:27:39 [DH]: That was before they built the viaduct you must have been close to Hanks...or Mitchell's pool hall was right there wasn't it?

[GH]: I lived... Mitchell's pool hall was on the other side of the viaduct... the other side of the tracks, yeah.

[LL]: So you were on the south side of the tracks.

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: The other side...

[GH]: Was a...

[LL]: Pool hall...

[GH]: Was a project...

[LL]: Maggie's court...

[GH]: Naw, Maggie's Court was further down.

[LL]: Further on down.

[GH]: You had the tracks you had the track there was Oliver on this side and around the other side of the track was a project and across the street from the project was Mitchell's.

[LL]: Ok.

[GH]: It was a street between the projects... a little small street...

[LL]: What... what projects are you talking about?

[GH]: It wasn't the housing authority.

[LL]: No, it wasn't.

[GH]: It was...

[LL]: Was it like Wold War II homes?

[GH]: Yeah. Because a friend of mine... a real good buddy of mine Lee McKnight who played for central when they won the state in 1957.

0:28:35 [LL]: He died not long ago.

[GH]: Yeah yeah. My buddy.

[LL]: Gloria was his...

[GH]: Naw, naw. There's two Lee McKnights.

[LL]: Oh, ok.

[GH]: Gloria's husband still living.

[LL]: Ok. That's not the one we're talking about.

[GH]: No.

[LL]: Ok.

[GH]: See, what happened was...

[LL]: Is this the one who played baseball? One of these McKnight supposedly...

[GH]: His older brother Ira he did.

[LL]: Oh.

[GH]: He's back here now.

[LL]: Ok.

[GH]: He was one we all thought would... Out of the ghetto we all thought he would make the big leagues.

[LL]: Ira McKnight.

[GH]: Ira

[LL]: Someone said that he played with the Kansas City...

[GH]: Kansas City Monarchs.

[LL]: Yeah.

[GH]: Yeah, I guess... a whole lot of stuff at home that they gave me.

[LL]: But he's still living.

[GH]: He signed with the Yankees but he... he was in the farm system.

[LL]: And you got some of his memorabilia?

[GH]: Oh yeah he... I talk to him all the time. He lives out there by me he lives in the pro... the apartments out there.

0:29:32 [LL]: Somebody we ought to interview?

[GH]: Oh yeah. Yeah. Ira McKnight. Yeah.

[LL]: We can get his phone number from you if we need it.

[GH]: I'll get it for you.

[LL]: Well now, do you remember... David's done a good bit of work on the Uncle Bill's Softball team. The girl's softball team.

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: That was played... they played in...

[GH]: Oliver park...

[LL]: Oliver park, right. That's across the street and across the tracks.

[GH]: Right, right.

[LL]: From where you grew up.

[GH]: Yeah, I saw it when I was a little kid. I used to watch them play.

[LL]: What else took place in that park besides base... the girls...

[GH]: Well you know that... that park they had a softball league and ZB Falcons. They'd all play there and the Catholic Schools would play there. St. Stephen's, they played softball there and ZB Falcons, MR Falcons all those team had they had softball teams, and I'd go out there every day and watch the softball games and they... although it was in the black community the park itself... when I was a kid it wasn't predominately... the participants weren't predominately black.

0:30:45 [LL]: Ok

[GH]: As a matter of fact, Lee McKnight... Lee McKnight. The one that died... that's the one that played for Central when they won the state in '57. I played with Lee and the Coleman brothers

[LL]: Ok.

[GH]: Ok. I was probably nine he was probably 8. We were sitting I the swings and a group of white fellas came over and said you guys, wanna play with us?' And said, 'if you sign up you get shirts and hats and you can quit.' We played... we played out there from age... for a couple of years,

and then when we got old enough to actually play we were probably the two best baseball players for our age in South Bend. So, I was going to Oliver to Mr. Szabo who was coaching the elementary basketball team at Oliver. He asked me to come out to Walker field and Mr. Szabo was just like Vince Lombardi we were... I was a little scared of him. So, I know the white fellas didn't want Lee and me out there...

0:31:47 [LL]: They had invited you earlier.

[GH]: Yep. But see... he invited me.

[LL]: Oh, ok.

[GH]: And I asked him if it will be ok. And he said, 'what do you mean will it be ok.' And I was scared to tell him about the racial thing. And he said, 'what did you mean is it going to be ok?' and he said, 'tell me what you are talking about.' I was scared to tell him what I was talking about. So, we... went out there and won the championship every year and Lee and I was the only two blacks on the team.

[LL]: This is... this is Mr. Szabo?

[GH]: Szabo.

[LL]: How do you spell it?

[GH]: S-z-a-b-o.

[LL]: Ok. Ok

[GH]: He... and... we played for...

[LL]: He would have been Hungarian. That's a Hungarian name.

[GH]: Yeah. Yeah.

[LL]: And you were the only two. So, you had an integrated team.

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: In that sense.

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: But you were a little bit uneasy about it.

0:32:35 [GH]: Well it was really funny because Lee and I was talking before he left. We went out there and once the fellas... they wanted to win and they knew we could help them win. And once... in their mind and their parents' mind we had no problem we went out there... we probably went out there three or four... at least three or four straight years and we won the championship every year. I'll tell you we never had a racial problem. I asked Lee I said, 'let me ask you a question you ever heard anybody say anything?' We never heard anything. Even the stuff that Jackie Robinson heard. We didn't hear that.

[LL]: You didn't? Not from the fans not from the players. That was in Walker Park.

[GH]: Walker Park.

[LL]: Across from Rum Village.

[GH]: Walker field. See Bob Kovach was mayor of Mishawaka. Bob Kovach was probably... I remember in the championship game he came and got us. And we thought we couldn't win. And he told me... 'if you guys don't play we can't win.' So, we jumped in the car and went out there and played at Studebaker Park under the lights big sellout crowd and we won the championship that night out there. But...

0:33:44 [LL]: And this was like a... was this a city league?

[GH]: Yeah. City league 10 11 12 13 and 14 and 15

[LL]: Softball.

[GH]: Baseball.

[LL]: Oh baseball. This was before little league.

[GH]: Oh yeah before little league. Yeah.

[LL]: You're just a little older than I am. I remember playing I started playing little league about 1954 or something like that.

[GH]: Did you know Paul Payne?

[LL]: No, I didn't know of course I know who he was. But I'm not from here I was down in the south.

[GH]: Really?

[LL]: And we didn't have integrated teams when I was growing up. Not in the south?

[GH]: Where are you from?

[LL]: Tennessee.

[GH]: What part?

[LL]: Eastern part. Near Knoxville.

[GH]: My parents were born in Brownsville.

[LL]: Oh, Brownsville. I know Brownsville very well. When did they come here?

[GH]: Let's see... they came in the early... in the 40s

0:34:46 [LL]: Ok during World War II would that be... you would have been...

[GH]: After they came here.

[LL]: You were born here.

[GH]: They came in the 30s then. Yeah.

[LL]: Still got family down there?

[GH]: I got an uncle down there. Have an uncle down there with a lot of money

[LL]: Is that right?

[GH]: Yeah. He's up there.

[LL]: I did some work in Jackson one time. Yep know that area, sure do. Obviously, sports was a big important part of your life, but you mentioned

dances out there at the white block houses. What... what other kinds of activities were available to young black kids growing up?

0:35:36 [GH]: We had a place called the Hering House and that was a place it was right on Western right across from the quads are now. And we had that's who where everybody went... just a place where they taught us discipline. Wasn't any drinking. We didn't drink as kids anyway. Any smoking, no talking back. As a matter of fact, Luther Dixon before he died I told him... I said, 'I really appreciate what you did for us.' He said well you guys were good kids, but I told him if you had... you know couldn't do it there and we definitely wouldn't do it at home. But that was a place that was probably... JD Oliver park in the day time, the summer time and then at night in the evening after school we'd all go the Hering House every night and they had skate parties out to Playland Park.

0:36:39 [LL]: Did you go out there?

[GH]: Yeah yeah.

[LL]: Anytime?

[GH]: I'd go out there. I think they'd go out there once a week and they would skate.

[LL]: Ok, the reason I'm asking is we had heard from some people that Playland didn't have there was only one night a week...

[GH]: That's right, that's right one night a week.

[LL]: And these would be skating parties that'd you'd organize through Hering House?

[GH]: No, no. You'd just pay money. They were just like the natatorium. They probably did that too. That was just one day a week.

[LL]: Did you go over to the natatorium to swim over...

[GH]: Yeah, yeah I was over there

[LL]: Ok.

[GH]: Yeah.

[DH]: Did you know Chuck Dempsey?

[GH]: Real well.

[DH]: He was very light skinned, and he was taught when the natatorium was segregated. He took swimming lessons there because they thought he was white.

[GH]: Ok.

[LL]: And he got one over on them.

[GH]: Is that right?

[DH]: Yeah.

0:37:32 [GH]: Yeah, I knew him real well as a matter of fact his daughter Phyllis came up with my sister and when I moved to the east side I moved right around the... see we moved... when I was a freshman in high school, I started Washington, and we moved right away. So, I went to the Washington High School district probably a couple of weeks, then I moved to the east side, so all four years I went to Washington, but I lived in Adams district.

[LL]: That was your choice?

[GH]: Yeah. I didn't want to transfer. They kept begging me to come over there, but I wouldn't go.

[LL]: Were there many... were many black kids at Adams?

[GH]: That's why I wouldn't go. It wasn't me; what I'm saying is many saying is that because in the summer time, Adams basketball players - all white kids I'd play with them. They would come get me all the time.

[LL]: So sports was a pretty equalized...

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: That would equalize people

0:38:25 [GH]: Oh yeah. Yeah that that that that would make them... as a matter of fact, I was talking to... we were talking the other day... I was talking to one

of the white fellas I was playing with, and we were sitting there talking one day I asked him... I said, 'what do you think about' - the word wasn't black then it was colored - 'what do you think about colored guys?' And he was serious. And this one black guy got a little pissed off with me cuz I didn't get on the guy. He said you and Sam Wright. Sam was a black fella going to Adams. Adams didn't have many guys going there. Then he said you guys are ok. He said but the rest of you can't trust. He was serious. He meant that. That's how he felt. And so they said, 'what did you do to him?' And I said, 'I didn't do nothing to him.' I said, 'that's how he felt. People are like that.' But that's how the fella felt. But no. I didn't want to go. I didn't want to transfer to play I could play in... I could have played over there because the coach used to come over to my house all the time. But there were probably four or five blacks at Adams in 19... I was a freshman in '52 so was only for our five blacks over there.

0:39:36 [LL]: Did that mean you had to walk to Washington?

[GH]: Naw naw naw. I caught the bus and transferred.

[LL]: Caught the bus and transferred.

[GH]: But it was just a situation where... See, I didn't play basketball at Oliver and middle school. I didn't play at all. I was on the team because I knew how to act and they liked me. Ok. They liked me as a person, but I had a uniform. I sat on the bench I would never go in because I could have helped them win, but what I did is I went out as a freshman at Washington...

[LL]: How come you didn't play? I mean...

[GH]: Well.

[LL]: Your choice. You didn't want...

[GH]: No no. I guess I was small I didn't have the ability and then so what happened is I started at Washington, and I didn't go football. They started football in August... August 15 then. August 20. I didn't go out then but I went out when school started but they didn't want to let me play at first they thought I was probably lazy and I had ducked the heat in summertime. But I ended playing first string quarterback as a freshman.

0:40:52 [LL]: Is that right?

[GH]: So then I went out for basketball and we had to get on the floor at 6 o'clock in the morning. That's when they would lock the door. Well mathematically, I couldn't get... My father never had a car, so I could not catch the bus and be at practice on time. So, what I had to do is start at a quarter to five every morning, and start walking down South Bend Avenue and then what happened is I'm hitchhiking, I'm walking toward the bus stop, but ain't no bus gon' be there. Not that early in the morning. So the Studebaker fellas, both black and white, got to know me so what they would do they would pick me up and drop me off on the corner of Sample and Chapin, and they would go on toward Studebakers, and I'd run down Sample Street, and I'd be the first one at practice every morning.

0:41:43 But didn't any blacks live around Washington, so when the season was over at end of the season the coach Bob Brady he said he said, 'George you must live around here somewhere. Where do you live? I said, 'I live on the east side.' He said, 'but does your father drop you off every morning?' My father doesn't have a car. How do you get here? I told him he didn't believe it. So, what happened is when I was inducted in Washington... when I was inducted. I was a charter member of the Hall of Fame when I got inducted in the Hall of Fame over at Washington High School, I was standing and they asked what are you thinking about? I said, 'I'm not thinking about tonight. I'm thinking about when I was a freshman because I was barely on the team if I would have missed one practice I'd have got cut.' I said, 'I know what it takes to make it in life.'

0:42:36 My mother I'd wake up in the morning my mother would say don't go it's 10 below zero and my mother would say get out here and shovel the snow on the sidewalk. I'd walk out on the street, I was so short they couldn't see me when I'd leave the house. And she'd beg me not to leave say please don't leave this morning and I'd say, 'mother if I miss one practice,' I was a freshman. 'I'm through.' The guys on the bench are waiting on me... they are crawling to get that position and I'd never get back on the floor again. I never missed practice, and I never missed a game and I always think about that when they are talking about the drive in life and when you keep begging about somebody ain't giving me a right break and all that kind of stuff you gotta get in there.

0:43:14 [LL]: Position yourself to take advantage of it when it comes that's right. You went... you obviously were recruited to Central State to play.

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: Was... what was his name? Walker.

[GH]: Jim Walker, Big Jim. Yeah he was the football coach.

[LL]: He was the football coach.

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: Ruby Page's brother

[GH]: Ruby worked with me

[LL]: Yeah. Ruby worked with you?

[GH]: Yeah, she retired. She worked in a little office same staff.

[LL]: Oh, I see.

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: So she was working with you in the Model Cities?

[GH]: No she, naw the downtown the CETA program. See the program name kept changing. Ruby worked at the Urban League for a long time.

[LL]: Yep.

[GH]: She left the Urban League to come with us.

[LL]: Ok.

[GH]: So, she was with us when she retired.

[LL]: Oh I see. Alright. And that was her brother?

[GH]: That was her brother they named the field after him down there.

[LL]: Ok.

[GH]: I got to know him real well down there.

[LL]: He have anything to do with recruiting... Were there others?

[GH]: No.

[LL]: Going over there?

0:44:12 [GH]: No, he didn't have anything. I met him down there. I knew who he was because at Washington they had a big picture because the football team in Washington played in DC one year. And he was the only black on that picture. And I even asked some of the fellas who played after me did they ever see the picture, and they said they did. I don't know where the picture is now.

[LL]: I think Mrs. Page told us he was the first black student at Washington.

[GH]: Is that right?

[LL]: Yeah.

[GH]: I know he made... he went to Iowa.

[LL]: He went to Iowa to play ball.

[GH]: Then he...

[LL]: That what she said he was the first black student?

[DH]: Yes.

[LL]: He was there he was the only one there.

[GH]: He was all American at Iowa.

[LL]: Not at Iowa but at Washington High.

[DH]: Oh yeah. He was the only one in the picture.

[LL]: Yeah, I thought she said even in the whole school.

[GH]: He might have been.

[LL]: When Washington High School first opened...

0:45:12 [GH]: He might have been.

[LL]: Yeah. I believe that's what she said. We'll have to listen.

[GH]: But he might have been.

[LL]: Right yeah wow. I'm just skipping around, there are a lot of things that you mentioned that I think are incredibly interesting. David, I don't want to... I know you're particularly interested in politics, so if there's anything you wanna get back to on that.

[DH]: I think we really covered politics. There's a couple of things I'd like to ask you about.

[GH]: Yeah, sure.

[DH]: You said you were a lathe operator in 1960.

[LL]: That was going to be my next question, too.

[GH]: I just got out of the service.

[DH]: That's a very skilled position? Where did you get your training?

0:45:47 [GH]: Well you know, it's really interesting and I'm glad you asked that. When we were at Oliver, what they would do regardless of your skill level—all the black fellas they'd say four years machine shop. I wasn't the smartest kid at Oliver in the group, but the smarter ones still had the same thing I had. You know the counselor is supposed to sit there and counsel. They didn't do us that way. They had our four-year plan laid out for us before we got in there. Four years of machine shop. And the irony about the thing is I don't think... there was one black machinist in South Bend that was working. I think his name was... I ended up knowing him real well. And finally his name was Willie Austin. Regardless of that so everybody took machine shop. So, I had machine shop, so I knew a little bit about it. But what happened was... 'til I got in there in 1960... when I got out of the service, we had a little recession. I went down to the employment office and they said we need somebody a laborer out there for temporarily. I went out there and...

[Audio ends]